

THE COMMUNICATIVE ROLES OF THE ÒSÌRÌGÌ (TRADITIONAL DRUM) IN ILE-IFE, NIGERIA

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Introduction

In Africa, people have used drum telegraphy to communicate with each other for centuries. Drum communication methods are not languages in their own right but they are based on actual natural languages. The sounds produced are conventionalized or idiomatic signals based on speech patterns. The messages are normally very stereotyped and context-dependent. Vidal (2012) opines that it is noteworthy that communication is indispensable to the interaction that occurs among Africans, individuals, music and the indigenous community.

This communicative interaction includes music and drumming as a mode of enacting a divine worship. Vidal (2012) concludes that, the African traditional drums also possess politico-religious significance which strengthens the leadership authority of the king of the royal court. Among the famous communication musical modes in Africa are the indigenous drums of West Africa from region known today as Nigeria.

Background to the Study

Daramola (2001) traces the origin of *òsìrìgì* drum to the original inhabitants of Ile-Ife. This historical account asserts that the *òsìrìgì* drum originally belonged to Orisateko (an important figure in ancient pre-dynastic Ife), as part of the revolution that accompanied the development of the institution of the *Ooni* as a dynasty. The seizure of the *Òsìrìgì* drum from its original custodian took place during a war led by Oranmíyan, the founder of the dynasties in Benin and Oyo and child of Ogun and Oduduwa, who was reputed to have been originally an Ile-Ife prince. The drum was confiscated, and a musician called Òmítótó was appointed to play it at the palace

P. S. Ayodele: *The Communicative Roles of the ÒSIRIGI (traditional Drum) in Ile-Ife ...* under the supervision of a high-chief called Oba Ioràn. The drum was brought to the palace from Ilode Quarters (Obaloran's base) on a daily basis for performance. It, therefore, became the possession of the Ile-Ife court while its music began to be solely used on state occasions and for important 'national' festivals like the *Olojo* festival.

The Osirigi Drum



Pic 1: *Osirigi* drum during Olojo Festival, 2020

Source: Ayodele Samuel.

The *òsírìgì* drum is a single-headed cylindrical wooden drum with a stretched membrane over the frame and tuning pegs that fasten the skin to the frame. It belongs to the membranophone family. The strap is suspended on the neck to hold the drum positioned slightly downwards the waist and it is played with bare hands. According to a primary source from the interview with the current handler, Chief Adereti (*Alaga Iṣẹṣe, Ilude Ife.*), explains that the Ife community acknowledges the usage of *òsírìgì* drum for cultural and religious functions and the ability of the drum to communicate is key which also influence the emotional aspect of their beliefs and practices. He reveals further that drumming is seen as an action which portrays the identity and life style of Ile-Ife and it is a symbolic means of communication among the drummers and those who understand the *òsírìgì* drum language. These actions are observed during celebrations and worships where *òsírìgì* plays a significant part

P. S. Ayodele: *The Communicative Roles of the ÒSIRIGÌ (traditional Drum) in Ile-Ife ...* in the collective socio-cultural experiences of the people as it reveals the pulse and their inner feelings.

Among the Yoruba community, *òsírìgì* drum can be identified as holding deeper symbolic and historical meanings as it adds accompaniment for any manner of ceremony ranging from births, deaths to marriages which is usually accompanied with a ritual dance. This usage is embedded with human, natural and spiritual formations which create leadership value for the people.



Pic 2: Image of the *Olosirigi*.

Source: Ayodele Samuel.

The *Olosirigi*: This is the name given to the *òsírìgì* musicians. According to the primary source, the *Òsírìgì* drums can only be played by the Ilude community/family. Certain rituals are conducted before every performance and the tradition is passed on from generation to generation through imitation, observation and participation. Any attempt to play it by a non-Ilude individual will have repercussion such as impotency according to my interviewee. Before a major festival, like the *olojo* festival, commences the *olosirigi* beats the *òsírìgì* drum seven times at all Ife's entrances and they finally come to Osogun's house at the seventh time in which the Osogun entertains them with pap and vegetable soup and after they eat, they drop the *osirigi* drum on a skin mat while the Osogun makes certain sacrifices on it with kolanut, water and gin while the *Olosirigi* return back to their various places.

The Communicative Roles of the Òsírìgì Drum in Ile-Ife.

The òsírìgì drum has several roles it plays which include social control, entertainment, religious, symbol of authority and unifying role but the communicative roles of the òsírìgì drum in Ile-Ife will be discussed here under two main sub-headings:

1. Communicative Roles with the Visible (Living People)
2. Communicative Roles with the Invisible Audience (Deity/Ancestors)

Communicative Roles with the Visible (Living People)

To the Royal House: One of the major functional roles of the drum is to wake the king up every morning by announcing the dawn of the day. This then signifies a call to duty.

ODE TOO

Ife Royal Court music

The musical score is for 'ODE TOO' in 8/8 time, marked with a tempo of 80. It features six parts: Singer, Response, Konkolo, Agbe Gong, Ajo, and Osirigi. The lyrics are: 'e mo nboba a re ta O sin O de O de O de to o o O de to o o O de to o'. The Osirigi part includes 'x' marks indicating specific drum patterns.

Score 1: 'ODE TO O' - A call to duty

| Song Text | Transliteration | Translation |
|------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| Call: Òdétó, Òdédèrè, | <i>Ode titó, ode tiya o, mo n tele</i> | Its time for outing, I am on a |
| <i>Mònbòba re a òsin</i> | <i>Oba losi Ode , ode ti ya</i> | journey with the King |
| Response: Odee | <i>Ode</i> | Outing |
| Call; Òdétó o | <i>Ode titolatilo</i> | It is time for outing |

As seen in the song above in Score 1, the drum is played to announce to the Royal King, Oṣẹni of Ife that it is time and it is safe for him to embark on the day's

P. S. Ayodele: *The Communicative Roles of the ÒṢIRIGI (traditional Drum) in Ile-Ife ...* special mission. It is sacred and compulsory for the king to be charged by the drum on every morning of the *Olojo* festival day and other sacred days before the king steps out of his sacred inner room. Omisakin, the Obalufe of Iremo (a royal father) explained the usage of this drum in different dimensions (Omisakin, 2020). He described the drum as “a natural royal drum” which belongs to Oòduà, the mythical ancestor of the Yoruba. The implication of the seizure or silence of such indigenous drum means the authority of the ruler of such community or tribe would have been disengaged or probably such ruler is deceased and the community is in a state of mourning. Its communicative roles to the king also include announcing the arrival of an important personality to the palace. A notable and the most peculiar attribute of the *Olosirigi* is that they know how to communicate by beating the panegyric (*oriki*) of the king and each of the chiefs that surrounds the king.

To the Community: The drum is used on special occasion to pass public messages from the royal court to the community at large. These include the announcement of the demise of a royal person, and the rendering of prayer of blessings to the indigenes as often seen during the *olojo* festival. The drum is skillfully manipulated to produce proverbial interjections and speech surrogates that can be decoded by several indigenes of Ile-Ife who understand the drum language. The listeners either sing along with the drum or respond to a call made by the drummer in a responsorial form as seen in figures 3 & 4.

NIRE NIRE

The musical score for 'NIRE NIRE' is presented in two systems. Each system consists of two staves: the top staff is for the 'Osirigi' (drum) and the bottom staff is for the 'Response' (vocal). The music is in 6/8 time. The first system includes the lyrics: 'Ni re ni re lan so ro a ta re a dun la gbéhin a ye e wa o a ju gbogbo'. The second system includes the lyrics: 'omo o o du a ile a se o'. The drum part uses a combination of notes and rests to create a rhythmic pattern, while the response part provides a vocal accompaniment.

Score 2: NIRE NIRE

Song Text

Osirigi call: *Nire nire lansoro atare-*

Response: *Ase*

Call: *Adun la gbehin aye e a o-*

Response: *Ase*

Call: *Aju gbogbo omo Oodua ile yi se o-*

Response: *Ase*

Translation

We speak well of brown pepper

Amen

Our end will be filled with goodness

Amen

It shall be well with all Oodua indigines

Amen

The score above in Score 2 is an extract from a prayer performance session by the *osirigi* to the indigene showering blessings upon the people in a call and response form. The drum also serves as sacred symbol of the ruler's office because through it, the sanctity of the office of the Ile-Ife rulers are maintained. Olupona (2011) established this when he explained that many symbols are used in connection with the office of the (African) rulers. Examples are the use of scepters as symbol of authority, and royal drums which symbolize their ability to communicate with the people.

Communicative Roles with the Invisible Audience (Deity/Ancestors)

The symbolic use of *òsirigì* identifies the pledge of loyalty of *Ooni* to his ancestors through constant consultation and communication. It indicates an expression of spiritual mediation during the festival. This recognition is attached to the sacredness of the drum when its life span terminates (retired) with the demise of an *Ooni*. A new *osirigi* drum must be made for new successor and this must be done before the enthronement of a new one. The set used during the reign of the deceased *Ooni* is permanently hung at the palace never to be played again. The symbolic explanation for this is that the drum accompanies a deceased *Ooni* to the world great beyond. This is an important aspect in the rite of passage that explains how the drum re-aggregates the king with his ancestors. It also establishes the concept of life after death. The hanging of the drum also expresses the concept of continuity in the rulership of the *Ooni*. This symbol identifies the continued support of the deceased king to the present *Ooni* and the fact that death could not in any way separate the dead from the living. It is also used to communicate to the divinity on prayers and blessings of the royal family and the community.



Pics 3 & 4: Images of the Osirigi Drum and Gongs on the floor and playing positions before and during performance at the Olojo festival 2020.

Source: Ayodele Samuel.

Structure of the *Osirigi* Ensemble

The ensemble is an all male (mixed) musical group of 11 musicians involving both instrumental and vocal ensemble performing sacred songs in which the instrumentalists double as the singers.

The instrumental ensemble consists of Òsírìgì drum and 5 metal gongs: 1 kónkóló, 2 Agbe and 2 Ajo.

The *Osirigi* Music

The Òsírìgì drum has the capability to produce up to three (3) or five (5) pitches depending on the size of its body frame. Its music is built on tritonic, tetratonic or pentatonic scales.



Figure 1: Tritonic scale - a scale of three notes.



Figure 2: Pentatonic scale

A pentatonic scale is a musical scale with five notes per octave.



Figure 3: Tetratonic scale

A tetratonic scale is a musical scale with four notes per octave.

Generally, the *Òṣirigì* drum communicates with the Yoruba pitch levels in which all the words in the dialects are spoken i.e.

Do: (low tone)

Re: (mid tone)

Mi: (high tone)

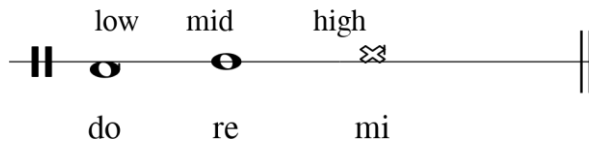


Figure 4: Tritone Illustration

The drum is a speech surrogate, it is capable of playing several proverbial interjections and can imitate the Yoruba speech to an extent as illustrated in scores 1 and 2. It is the chief instrument in the *Ooni Osirigi* drums' ensemble and the entire musical group is named after it.



Pic 5: Image of the Konkolo (gong) in action at Olojo Festival 2020.
Source: Ayodele Samuel.

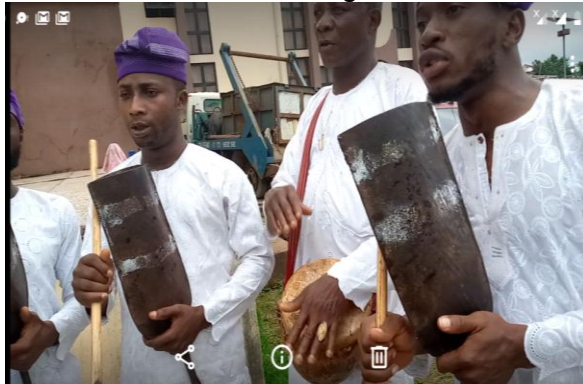
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Kónkóló: is a metal gong usually made by the goldsmith. It is the smallest in size among the gongs and it functions as the time keeper of the group. It is played with a wooden stick/beater. It usually starts the orchestra and communicates the time signature and tempo to the rest of the group. It belongs to the idiophone family. Score 3 below shows a typical rhythmic pattern of the kónkóló.

“OGONGO”

Score 3: *The Osirigi Ensemble score*
 Copyright: *Ilude community, Ile Ife.*

AGBE - Gong



Pic 6: *Image of the Agbe (gongs) in action at Olojo Festival 2020*
 Source: *Ayodele Samuel.*

Agbe is another metal gong that is a bit bigger in size than the *konkolo* and it is usually up to 2 or 3 playing phrasing linear that creates cross rhythm. It

P. S. Ayodele: *The Communicative Roles of the ÒSIRIGI (traditional Drum) in Ile-Ife ...* complements the *konkolo* in a very interlocking pattern at various points. It belongs to the idiophone family too. This is illustrated in the score in pic 6.

AJO - Gong

Ajo is also a metal gong but it is the biggest in the set with the capacity to produce up to 3-tones and it is usually 2 (two) or more in number. The *ajo* plays a lot of improvisation all through the performance. The metal gong is played with a wooden stick/beater. It functions as a rhythmic fill ups at times playing ostinatos which is continually repeated until the end of that song. This is also illustrated in Pic 7:



*Pic 7: Image of the Ajo (gong) in action at Olojo Festival 2020
Source: Ayodele Samuel.*

Conclusion

The *Òsìngì* Oṣṣi music is such a unique performance to witness live and the communicating capabilities of African drums are so limitless and this is a huge edge over the “almighty” western instruments. The indigenous African culture needs to be preserved and more research work should be conducted on the various African talking drums and their supernatural capabilities. Education should be seen as a tool and medium of preserving this traditional music and not a way of eroding it. This could be in form of print or electronic media where more research works, articles, documentaries and other scholarly works can evolve on this cultural heritage. There

P. S. Ayodele: *The Communicative Roles of the ÒṢIRIGI (traditional Drum) in Ile-Ife ...* is a need for a formal traditional education not only on òṣírìgì music but all other African musical genres. This could be achieved by embedding relevant studies in this area in the curriculum right from primary school education in subjects such as Social Studies, Civic Education and Cultural and Creative Arts.

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